

REMARKS FOR ADMINISTRATOR MICHAEL S. REGAN
PERMANENT FORUM ON PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT
MAY 30, 2023

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you, Chairperson Campbell Barr, for that kind introduction.

I bring you greetings from the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and I'm humbled and truly honored for the opportunity to stand before you all today.

At EPA, it's our privilege and greatest responsibility to protect public health and the environment — and ensuring that **all people** have clean air to breathe, and clean water to drink, is an integral part of that responsibility.

For decades, EPA has maintained a highly successful international program...building partnerships with countries across the African diaspora, and across the world.

And this EPA is committed to using our longstanding international experience to build on these partnerships, while uplifting countries and communities that have disproportionately suffered from the impacts of pollution and climate change.

We know that overlapping injustices, from economic inequality, to environmental degradation, have robbed so many people of African descent — both on the continent and across the diaspora — from reaching their full potential.

We also recognize that all of society's greatest challenges are interconnected.

That means the fight for human rights and the fight for environmental, economic, health, and racial justice, are inseparable.

We simply cannot be for one without the other.

And let me be clear, it's a fight for all people...a fight that transcends race, language, and national origin...a fight for humanity.

I'm proud to work for a President and Vice President who understand this viscerally. Not only have President Biden and Vice President Harris both dedicated their careers to building a future more fair and more just for all, but they've also made equity and justice a central priority for this administration.

Just last month, President Biden signed an Executive Order revitalizing our nation's commitment to environmental justice for all.

And this EPA is working every single day to uphold that commitment.

That's why, back in November 2021, our team launched our Journey to Justice tour.

Journey to Justice is an opportunity to meet face to face with people on their front porches...in their churches...and at their schools to see firsthand the challenges they endure.

It's an opportunity to leverage the power of the media, and social media, to bring national and international attention to environmental justice challenges that have lingered for far too long.

So, we began our journey through the southern United States.

We met with Black and brown communities in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas — and witnessed environmental conditions that were simply unacceptable.

I'm talking about children going to school right next door to chemical plants, elementary school students having to rely on portable toilets, and generations of families sickened with cancer, likely connected to the air they breathe.

We traveled to Puerto Rico and engaged with communities that have been overburdened by pollution for decades.

We met with people who reside just a stone's throw away from a coal-fired power plant and live in constant worry about the pollution in the air they breathe and water they drink.

And most recently, we took Journey to Justice to McDowell County, West Virginia — one of the poorest counties in America. There we met with people who've had to grapple with failing and inadequate wastewater systems for years.

Our agency has since taken a series of actions directly responding to what we saw while on the ground.

Not only is Journey to Justice an opportunity to spotlight the persistent challenges that have plagued many US communities for years — but it's an opportunity to teach... and to learn...and to share our *journey to justice*...with people around the world.

Because inequities like the ones we witnessed don't just harm the communities who experience them — they harm us all.

They hold us all back, and endanger our future.

But I want to be clear, our concern is not limited to United States borders. I'm here today to emphasize EPA's commitment to working collaboratively with the international community to ensure a healthy future for all people.

I'm excited to announce that in December, I plan to embark on a trip to Africa, and I'm looking forward to engaging with various countries, and learning how communities across the continent are working to address their environmental needs through technology, clean energy production, and technical assistance.

I also recognize that Africa presents a world of opportunity for collaboration and innovation.

Africa has the largest youth population in the entire world, and so many young people are leading the charge in the fight for a cleaner, healthier, and more just tomorrow.

In fact, youth leaders all across the diaspora are holding decision-makers accountable, and fighting fiercely to build a brighter future.

The reality is, the impacts of climate change that we are experiencing today, from extreme heat and catastrophic flooding to prolonged droughts and uncontrollable wildfires often disproportionately impact Black communities, and communities of color across the world. And we can no longer leave these communities to deal with these challenges alone.

We're developing our international relationships, and working with people across the diaspora to address longstanding environmental concerns...

We're fighting for the people of this country, and for people across the world, because we recognize that all of society's greatest challenges are interconnected...

Because we know that the fight for human rights and the fight for environmental, economic, health, and racial justice for all, are inseparable....

As EPA Administrator, I will never lose sight of our commitment to protecting all communities.

Everything we do – everything I do – at EPA is rooted in the belief that all people, no matter the color of their skin, the money in their pocket, or the community they live in, deserve clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and the opportunity to lead a healthy life.

Each of us have a role to play in this fight for justice.

And together, we will achieve true justice for all.

Thank you.

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